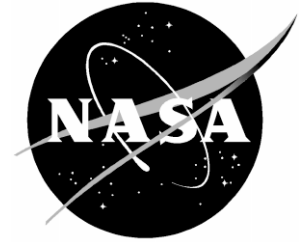


NewsRelease

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March 4, 2003

RELEASE: 03-017

NASA LANGLEY SPONSORS FOURTH ANNUAL ROBOTICS COMPETITION IN RICHMOND

After six weeks of intense design and construction to build an original robot, high school students nationwide - including Hampton, Norfolk and Virginia Beach, Va., - will demonstrate their science, mathematics and technology skills in the FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) Robotics Competition.

Sponsored by NASA's Langley Research Center and Virginia Commonwealth University's School of Engineering, the fourth annual regional robotics competition will be held on March 6-8 at the Siegel Center in Richmond, Va. Over 60 teams will compete for honors and recognition that reward design excellence, competitive play, sportsmanship and high-impact partnerships between schools, businesses and communities.

The FIRST competition is the largest of 24 regional robotics competitions held nationwide. NASA Langley is again working closely with a team from the New Horizons Regional Education Center in Hampton, Va. NASA and New Horizons have formed a partnership where students work along side current and retired NASA engineers and technicians as well as a top engineer from private industry.

NASA Langley's Dave Fahringer, from the Systems Engineering Competency, is playing the lead mentor for this year's team. "Team members get to work in many different job positions and all tasks are important to the team," says Fahringer. "My hope for all the students is that they strive for quality in all that they do."

Each year, FIRST develops the robotics competition by supplying a "problem" and a kit of parts to teams of students. Each team has just six weeks to organize, design, build, program and test its robot for competition. In this year's game, "Stack Attack," robots are designed to collect and stack plastic storage containers that are initially located on a two-foot high platform or placed on 54-foot long by 24-foot wide playing field.

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Each team alliance must place containers in a scoring zone on its own side of the field to score points. The total number of points earned depends on the how many containers are located in each alliance's scoring zone, multiplied by the number of containers in their highest stack.

The FIRST Robotics Regional Competition expects participation from more than 300 teams from Britain, Brazil, and the United States. More than 600 students will compete to earn a spot at the Championship held April 25-27 at Reliant Park in Houston, Texas.

FIRST is a non-profit organization, established in 1989 by Dean Kamen, an entrepreneur and inventor with over 100 patents. FIRST's mission is to stimulate student interest in math and science. In 1992, FIRST began organizing a national robotics competition. The goal of the program is to join high school students with professional engineers and technicians from industry and academia to design, construct and operate the robots. The event has become known as the "super-bowl" of engineering and the "the ultimate mind sport."

Media Opportunity:

News media are invited to attend the competition. The competition will be broadcast via the Internet on **Friday, March 7 and Saturday, March 8** at <http://robots.larc.nasa.gov>. Interviews and b-roll of the competition will also be available. Interested media should call **Kimberly W. Land, 757-864-9885 or 757-344-8611/cell phone**.
